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DEPARTMENT FOR USSES GRATION, AF A/S CARSON, AF/C, NSC FOR  
MGAVIN, ADDIS ABABA PLEASE PASS TO USAU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: MINNAWI PREPARES TO COUNTER JEM DEPREDACTIONS

REF: A. KHARTOUM 621  
[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 597

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SLM/A leader Minni Minnawi told CDA Fernandez on May 12 that he is returning to the field in Darfur as soon as possible, perhaps on May 13, to defend his remaining positions in North Darfur against the depredations of the Chadian-supported Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). JEM attacked SLA-Minnawi held positions last week in North Darfur as it did in January in South Darfur (reftels). Minnawi has been beating the bushes for additional resources to bolster his depleted forces. On May 11, he traveled to Juba to ask the SPLA for arms and ammunition. He met with GOSS VP Riek Machar and GOSS Minister of Presidential Affairs Luka Biong Deng but was unable to connect with SPLA generals. He received only vague promises of support from Juba although he conceded that "even if they had been able to give me something, how could I get it to the field in Darfur?"

[1](#)2. (C) Realizing that he is in the bullseye of JEM's stated objective to absorb or destroy all other Darfur rebel groups, Minnawi, as Senior Assistant to the President and - on paper - the 4th person in the Sudanese Government, had also asked for material military assistance from the authorities in Khartoum. Minister of Defense Abdurahim Hussein "would never give me even one bullet," he claimed as Hussein still smarts from the repeated drubbings Minnawi gave SAF in 2004/2005 before signing the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Minnawi was able to get 20 landcruisers from NISS chief Salah Ghosh who protested that "that is the most I can do and will do no more in the future." That contribution was important because Minni noted that he has enough fighters but not enough vehicles. Most of his remaining forces are now gathered just west of El Fasher waiting for his arrival. Minni may also reach out to other anti-JEM rebel leaders from SLM/AW and the remaining rump of SLM/Unity to form a loose coalition but is skeptical about how much help they can actually provide. He has even contacted Janjaweed leader Musa Hilal about a common front against JEM. They agreed to meet in the near future in Darfur. He noted that Hilal has become much more independent of Khartoum's direct control after discussions with CDA Fernandez in 2008, "he is opposed to Khartoum, fighting for himself and his people, but can't show it too clearly or they will cut him off."

[1](#)3. (C) While in good spirits about possible renewed fighting, Minnawi railed against JEM and those naive enough to be taken in by them. Referring to JEM as the " Hamas of Sudan," he noted the organization's dubious and intolerant antecedents as part of the Sudanese islamist movement, JEM Chairman Khalil Ibrahim's past as a holy warrior (mujahid) in South Sudan, and the movement's lust for absolute power. Minni speculated that some or all of JEM's recent largesse in

buying rebel commanders comes, not from Libya or Chad as some have speculated, but from the gullible Qataris, eager to "buy" an illusory peace in Darfur at any price. "I can guarantee you one thing, that even if JEM consolidates power in Darfur, it will not bring peace," he emphasized grimly. He added that he would not be in this precarious position he is today if the USG, led by Deputy Secretary Zoellick, had not pressured him to sign the DPA in 2006 with the Khartoum regime.

¶4. (C) Comment: Befuddled at times by the political intrigue of Darfur, Minnawi is at his best in the field, fighting the traditional Zaghawa war of raiding and maneuver, against long odds. He has been counted out before too soon but faces perhaps his greatest challenge as JEM is now flush with cash, lancruisers and weapons in addition to many of the fighters of SLM/Unity (who once were loyal to Minni). His best chance is to pick off stray JEM columns, bloody their noses and live to fight another day while preserving his territories in North Darfur and his formal position in Khartoum. The NCP of President Bashir will be hoping that he and JEM batter each other, reducing the number of troublesome Zaghawa men in the world. Even if he survives this round, he faces perilous days ahead with enemies in both Darfur and Khartoum and only a few political allies and members of his own clan standing with him. End comment.  
FERNANDEZ